

**IN THE CLAIMS:**

The text of all pending claims, (including withdrawn claims) is set forth below. Cancelled and not entered claims are indicated with claim number and status only. The claims as listed below show added text with underlining and deleted text with ~~strikethrough~~. The status of each claim is indicated with one of (original), (currently amended), (cancelled), (withdrawn), (new), (previously presented), or (not entered).

Please AMEND claims 1-3, 6-12, and 15-16, CANCEL claims 4, 5, and 13-14, and ADD new claims 17 and 18 in accordance with the following:

1. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A communications intermediating method for mediating communications user terminals carry out sharing at least one virtual spaces-space on a network, via an intermediating terminal, the communications intermediating method, comprising:

~~furnishing network resource symbols to the user terminals~~ storing, in a user terminal, a preference table in which at least one network resource symbol and predetermined preference data are correlated, the preference data including positional information of the symbol to be displayed on the user terminal and indicating a level of similarity in preference of a user towards the symbol;

~~setting up in advance a correspondence table in which identifiers for the virtual spaces and identifiers for the symbols are correlated~~ storing, in the intermediating terminal, a correspondence table in which identifiers for virtual spaces, identifiers for symbols and levels of similarity in preference of users towards the symbols are correlated;

~~providing an intermediating terminal enabling communication with the user terminals, and based on the correspondence table enabling conversion between the symbol identifiers and the virtual space identifiers~~ sending an identifier for the symbol and the preference data indicating the level of similarity in preference from the user terminal to the intermediating terminal;

~~sending the symbol identifiers from the user terminals to the intermediating terminal~~ computing, in the intermediating terminal, a level of similarity in user preference based on the preference data received from the user terminal, and notifying to the user terminal a virtual space identifier corresponding to the received symbol identifier and the computed level of similarity in user preference based on the correspondence table; and

~~reporting from the intermediating terminal to the user terminals the virtual space~~

~~identifiers that correspond to the symbols; wherein~~

~~based on the a reported virtual-space identifiers-identifier the user terminals-terminal participate in the virtual spaces-space and initiate communication with at least one other user terminals-terminal having the same-symbolssymbol.~~

2. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) An intermediating device for mediating communications among user terminals on a network, the intermediating device including:

a correspondence table in which identifiers for virtual spaces, identifiers for symbols, and levels of similarity in preference of users towards the symbols are correlated~~-correlatively storing identifiers for virtual spaces, where the user terminals-participate mutually to communicate, with identifiers for network resource symbols;~~

a first reception means for receiving the symbol identifiers from the user terminals; and  
a computing unit computing a level of similarity in user preference based on the preference data received from the user terminal, and notifying to the user terminal a virtual space identifier corresponding to the received symbol identifier and the computed level of similarity in user preference based on the correspondence table; and

a first transmission means for transmitting to the user terminals the virtual-space identifiers that based on said correspondence table correspond to ~~the~~received symbol identifiers.

3. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The intermediating device set forth in claim 2, wherein:

said correspondence table correlatively stores the virtual-space identifiers, the symbol identifiers, and ~~levels of interest in~~interest levels in the symbols;

said first reception means receives from the user terminals the symbol identifiers and the interest levels; and

said first transmission means transmits to the user terminals the virtual-space identifiers that based on said correspondence table correspond to the received symbol identifiers and to the received interest levels in combination.

4. (CANCELLED)

5. (CANCELLED)

6. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A computer-readable recording medium on which is recorded a communications program for use by user terminals on a network, the computer-readable recording medium characterized by including a program configured for:

storing, in a user terminal, a preference table in which at least one network resource symbol and predetermined preference data are correlated, the preference data including positional information of the symbol to be displayed on the user terminal and indicating a level of similarity in preference of a user towards the symbol;

a step of acquiring via a network, and selectably displaying, network resource symbols;

a step of transmitting to an intermediating device identifiers for user-selected network resource symbols;

a step of receiving identifiers for virtual spaces that correspond to ~~identifiers for network resource symbols~~ symbol identifiers transmitted based on a correspondence table in the intermediating device correlatively storing in advance network resource symbols with virtual spaces; and

sending an identifier for the symbol and the preference data indicating the level of similarity in preference from the user terminal to the intermediating terminal;

a step of connecting to a given virtual space based on identifiers in received virtual spaces, and initiating chat.

7. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A merchandise information exchange support method characterized by:

preparing a correspondence table in which merchandise and virtual chat spaces for exchanging information on the merchandise are correlated in advance;

storing, in an intermediating terminal, said correspondence table in which identifiers for virtual spaces, identifiers for symbols and levels of similarity in preference of users towards the symbols are correlated;

storing, in a user terminal, a preference table in which at least one network resource symbol and predetermined preference data are correlated, the preference data including positional information of the symbol to be displayed on the user terminal and indicating a level of similarity in preference of a user towards the symbol;

sending an identifier for the symbol and the preference data indicating the level of similarity in preference from the user terminal to the intermediating terminal;

computing, in the intermediating terminal, a level of similarity in preference based on the preference data received from the user terminal, and notifying to the user terminal a virtual space identifier corresponding to the received symbol identifier and the computed level of similarity in preference based on the correspondence table

presenting to user terminals<sub>1</sub> via a network<sub>1</sub> symbols prepared per merchandise item in order to display the merchandise identifiably;

identifying merchandise symbols selected in user terminals;

acquiring and reporting to the user terminals information for identifying virtual chat spaces correlated based on the correspondence table to given merchandise; and

enabling in a one user terminal exchange of information on the given merchandise with other user terminals to begin.

8. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A communications intermediating method for mediating communications ~~user~~ among user terminals on a network, the communications intermediating method comprising:

storing, in an intermediating terminal, a correspondence table in which identifiers for virtual spaces, identifiers for symbols and levels of similarity in preference of users towards the symbols are correlated~~correlatively storing identifiers for virtual spaces, where the user terminals participate mutually to communicate, with identifiers for network resource symbols;~~

~~receiving the symbol identifiers from the user terminals; and~~

~~transmitting to the user terminals the virtual space identifiers that based on the stored data correspond to the received symbol identifiers~~computing, in the intermediating terminal, a level of similarity in preference based on the preference data received from the user terminal, and notifying to the user terminal a virtual space identifier corresponding to the received symbol identifier and the computed level of similarity in preference based on the correspondence table.

9. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A computer-readable recording medium on which is recorded a communications intermediating program for mediating communications among user terminals on a network, the computer-readable recording medium on which is recorded a communications intermediating program for executing:

a step of selectably displaying on user terminals network resource symbols;

storing, in an intermediating terminal, a correspondence table in which identifiers for virtual spaces, identifiers for symbols and levels of similarity in preference of users towards the symbols are correlated;

a step of receiving identifiers for network resources selected in response to operations on the user terminals;

a step of acquiring ~~identifiers for virtual spaces~~ virtual-space identifiers correlated to received network resource symbol identifiers based on a correspondence table made by correlatively storing in advance ~~identifiers for network resource symbols~~ symbol identifiers with identifiers for virtual spaces; and

a step of transmitting the acquired virtual-space identifiers to the user terminals; and  
computing, in the intermediating terminal, a level of similarity in preference based on the preference data received from the user terminal, and notifying the user terminal of a virtual space identifier corresponding to the received symbols identifier and the computed level of similarity in preferences based on the correspondence table.

10. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A communications method for use by a user terminal on a network, the communications method comprising:

acquiring network resource symbols;

storing, in a user terminal, a preference table in which at least one network resource symbol and predetermined preference data are correlated, the preference data including positional information of the symbol to be displayed on the user terminal and indicating a level of similarity in preference of a user towards the symbol;

~~transmitting identifiers for the symbols to a predetermined information terminal enabling conversion between identifiers for the virtual spaces and identifiers for the symbols, wherein communication with other user terminals is carried out~~ sending an identifier for the symbol and the preference data including the level of similarity in preferences from the user terminal to the intermediating terminal;

receiving from the information terminal virtual-space identifiers corresponding to the symbols;

participating, based on the virtual-space identifiers, in the virtual spaces and initiating communication with other user terminals having the same symbols.

11. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A communications device for communicating on a network, the communications device comprising:

acquisition means for acquiring network resource symbols;

storing, in a user terminal, a preference table in which at least one network resource symbol and predetermined preference data are correlated, the preference data including positional information of the symbol to be displayed on the user terminal and indicating a level of similarity in preference of a user towards the symbol;

communication means for participating in virtual spaces on the network to carry out communications with other communications devices;

a second transmission means for transmitting ~~identifiers for the symbols~~ symbol identifiers to a predetermined information terminal enabling conversion between ~~identifiers for the virtual spaces~~ virtual-space identifiers and the symbol identifiers;

a second reception means for receiving from the information terminal the virtual-space identifiers that correspond to the symbols;

sending an identifier for the symbol and the preference data indicating the level of similarity in preference from the user terminal to the intermediating terminal; and

connection means for initiating, based on the virtual-space identifiers, communication with other communications devices having the same symbols.

12. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The communications device of claim 11, further comprising a preference table in which symbols acquired by the communications device of claim 11 and level of interest in the symbols are correlatively stored; wherein

said second transmission means transmits to the predetermined information terminal the ~~identifiers for the symbols~~ symbol identifiers and the level of interest.

13. (CANCELLED)

14. (CANCELLED)

15. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A merchandise presentation method cooperating with a chat system to enable exchange of messages mutually among multiple user terminals sharing

virtual spaces structured on a network, the merchandise presentation method comprising:

selectably presenting to a user terminal a symbol prepared for each merchandise to identifiably display the merchandise via a network;

storing, in a user terminal, a preference table in which at least one network resource symbol and predetermined preference data are correlated, the preference data including positional information of the symbol to be displayed on the user terminal and indicating a level of similarity in preference of a user towards the symbol;

storing, in the intermediating terminal, a correspondence table in which identifiers for virtual spaces, identifiers for symbols and levels of similarity in preference of users towards the symbols are correlated;

sending an identifier for the symbol and the preference data indicating the level of similarity in preference from the user terminal to the intermediating terminal;

computing, in the intermediating terminal, a level of similarity in preference based on the preference data received from the user terminal, and notifying to the user terminal a virtual space identifier corresponding to the received symbol identifier and the computed level of similarity in preference based on the correspondence table;

obtaining and sending to a user terminal an identifier of a virtual chat space, which is made to correlate-correlates to an identifier of a symbol and then stored when receiving an identifier of a symbol reported according to user selection; and

connecting the user terminal to the virtual chat space to start to exchange messages with other user terminals.

16. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A communications support method, characterized by:

storing, in a user terminal, a preference table in which at least one network resource symbol and predetermined preference data are correlated, the preference data including positional information of the symbol to be displayed on the user terminal and indicating a level of similarity in preference of a user towards the symbol;

storing, in the intermediating terminal, a correspondence table in which identifiers for virtual spaces, identifiers for symbols and levels of similarity in preference of users towards the symbols are correlated;

sending an identifier for the symbol and the preference data indicating the level of similarity in preference from the user terminal to the intermediating terminal;

computing, in the intermediating terminal, a level of similarity in preference based on the preference data received from the user terminal, and notifying to the user terminal a virtual space identifier corresponding to the received symbol identifier and the computed level of similarity in preference based on the correspondence table;

preparing for each merchandise a chat space ~~virtually installed on~~ a network which invites users interested in relevant merchandise and a correspondence table where merchandise and a chat space corresponding said merchandise are correlatively stored;

selectably presenting to a user terminal a symbol prepared for each merchandise to identifiably display said merchandise via a network;

identifying a symbol of merchandise selected by a user terminal; and

obtaining information for identifying a virtual chat space correlated to relevant merchandise according to said correspondence table to issue a command for inviting relevant user terminal to relevant virtual chat space and starting communication between users having common interest in ~~common~~ merchandise.

17. (NEW) A communications intermediating method, for mediating communications performed by a first user terminal and a second user terminal sharing at least one virtual space on a network, the communications intermediating method, comprising:

furnishing at least one network resource symbol to the first user terminal;

setting up in advance a correspondence table in which identifiers for virtual spaces and identifiers for symbols are correlated;

sending an acquisition request for acquiring the symbol that the first user terminal has from the second user terminal to the intermediating terminal on the network;

requesting an identifier of the symbol from the intermediating terminal to the first user terminal in response to the request from the intermediating terminal;

sending, from the intermediating terminal, the received symbol identifier from the first user terminal to the second user terminal;

reading out a virtual-space identifier that corresponds to the symbol identifier from the correspondence table and reporting to the first user terminal and the second user terminal by the intermediating terminal;



wherein based on the reported virtual-space identifier the first user terminal and the second user terminal participate in the virtual space and initiate communication with other user terminals having the same symbols.

18. (NEW) A method of electronically communicating, comprising:  
providing a symbol identifying merchandise;  
determining a virtual chat space identifier corresponding to said symbol; and  
connecting an electronic device to said virtual chat space based on said virtual chat space identifier to allow communication regarding the merchandise.